CPE Proposal for $30,000
Western Kentucky University

This proposal addresses WKU's goal to develop flexible programming and portfolio-based prior learning assessment for our adult learners. While *wkuREAL* (Reaching Each Adult Learner) provides a foundation for this grant, the funds are needed to provide incentives and training for faculty who are willing to alter their courses (or develop new ones) so that non-traditional students' scheduling and learning styles are better addressed. Additionally, funds are requested to provide professional development for WKU faculty in the assessment of prior learning.

Analysis of Need/Problem Statement

wkuREAL, a cross-campus/community effort with an ambitious institutional plan, is funded by both by the State, through the CPE's stewardship grant, and by institutional contribution. From August to December 2008 efforts were focused on research—studying the results of the ALI and the ISA surveys; engaging in focus groups with students, faculty, and staff (five in all); meeting with a broad range of service providers at WKU; training three new Adult Learner Counselors, whose primary purpose is to help students "navigate the complex process of enrolling, transferring credit, and finding financial aid"; identifying a name and an image (shown above), forming and Adult Learner Advisor Council with both on- and off-campus representatives, and developing a marketing strategy. We have also developed a core set of values for adult learning at WKU. We refer to them as the "3 Ps of *wkuREAL*:

- A *philosophy* that recognizes and meets the unique needs of students who do not meet "traditional" demographics;

- A *place* where adult learners can come to browse materials, talk with adult learner counselors, navigate WKU web pages, and begin the steps for entering the university;

- A streamlined *process* whereby students can make the transition to school, even after several years.

Based on the data collected from the ALI and ISA, we have identified several areas for improvement—outreach, flexible programming, finance, and overall climate. Of these, the flexible programming most effectively links the other needs. If adult learners' educational needs

are met, and if they see that WKU is responding to the demands on their time, they will be more likely to perceive the overall climate as positive.

In part to address these broad areas that need improvement, the Advisory Council has formed working groups—marketing, outreach, support services, and curriculum. With representatives from each College, this group has begun the crucial process of raising awareness about "adult-focused courses" and helping faculty develop flexible programming to meet the needs of a diverse range of potential students. (See Appendix for a Call for proposals and a scoring rubric that we would use, if we are able to move forward with this.)

Another endeavor currently underway is the development of a portfolio-based assessment of prior learning. A team of WKU faculty and administrators visited the University of Louisville in April to meet with the faculty responsible for their Workforce Leadership major and to learn about their course-based portfolio model for prior learning assessment (PLA). Our goal is to implement a similar PLA model here at WKU. Additionally, plans are underway to bring a CAEL (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning) consultant to WKU and to attend a national conference to assist us in gaining a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities of developing flexible programming and implementing PLA.

Funding from the CPE would allow us to build on the success of *wkuREAL* and to provide a "jump start" for the curricular initiatives mentioned here.

The Need for Flexible Programming and Prior Learning Assessement

Given the challenges that adult learners face when they try to access higher education, it is crucial to address them systematically. This proposal represents an important opportunity to address—and change—the situation of so many adults, many of who have some college education but no associate's or bachelor's degree. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (*Serving Adult Learners in Higher Education*), adult students often:

- Have delayed enrollment into postsecondary education
- Attend part-time
- Are financially independent of parents
- Work full-time while enrolled
- Have dependents other than a spouse
- Are a single parent
- Lack a standard high school diploma or have questionable past academic success
- Nonetheless, collectively have a high record of post-secondary success

If left unaddressed, any one of these issues can become a significant barrier to an adult learner's access to and completion of a college degree. These are the sorts of issues that *wkuREAL* is addressing in the coming years.

Regrettably, according to Earl Thomas, "adult learning programs are marginalized, neglected and ultimately left out of a college or university's mission. And when these programs are fortunate

enough to be included in an institution's mission, they are treated as peripheral additions to the institution's mainstream programs." Through *wkuREAL,* WKU has taken an important step towards becoming an institution that does not allow this to happen. Lessons learned from extensive surveys (Adult Learner Inventory and the Institutional Self Assessment) and focus groups have helped clarify needed changes. WKU has contributed substantial resources to help ensure that *wkuREAL* succeeds—indication that we are taking these issues very seriously.

The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) has identified at least four needs unique to adult students (*Serving Adult Learners)*:

1. Different kinds of information about their educational options
2. Institutional flexibility in curricular and support services
3. Academic and motivational advising supportive of their life and career goals
4. Recognition of experience and work-based learning already obtained

This proposal builds on current efforts and provides a key element of acceleration for the second and fourth needs expressed above.

The urgency of change—and the promise of a solution through focusing on adult learners—is affirmed in the following CAEL statement:

> Efforts to jump-start our economy and re-build for the 21st Century, however, require large numbers of semi-skilled and highly-skilled workers. Our skilled workforce has long been a source of pride for our country. But our educational attainment has slowed in recent years, and we have now fallen behind countries like Korea, Ireland and Japan in the percentage of younger workers with an associate's degree or higher. For President-elect Obama's economic strategies to work, we need to invest more of our resources in workforce education and training, particularly training that leads to postsecondary degrees and credentials. (*Retooling Our Workforce*)

This grant would allow WKU to enhance its capacity to serve adult learners through the development of flexible programming and credit for appropriate work-based learning. Flexible programming may include the following:

- On-site or off-site instruction
- Modular formats
- Intensive week-end schedules (Friday-Saturday-Sunday) for several weekends
- Interactive distance learning
- Blended learning (online, instructor led, & hands-on)
- Computer based CD-ROM training
- Assessment of work-based learning
- Compressed scheduling

In order to achieve enhance the capacity of WKU to serve adult learners through flexible programming and credit for appropriate work-based learning, faculty need to be supported through focused training and encouragement incentives. According to Lee Bash, author of *Best*

Practices of Adult Learning, "There are simply too many aspects of adult learning that are unique and distinctive—where the job can't be done with cookie-cutter solutions used in traditional classrooms" (xv).

One reason for the dis-connect between "education as usual" and a more inclusive model, has to do with the fact that "the dominant metaphor of the traditional education pipeline largely ignores a major segment of the learners in our postsecondary education system today and provides little guidance for those outside the pipeline who may wish to enter. If we are . . . to reach the levels of educational attainment necessary for our future, we must expand the metaphor, and the data and relevant information, to include all of our learners. Young and older, traditional or nontraditional—all learners should count" ("Adult Learning in Focus").

One important key to making the shift is faculty willing to change the way they offer courses. Such a focus on this shift, depending as it does "on enhancing instructional effectiveness, can pay very large dividends. A solid system of induction for new faculty enables long-term success. Persistent and democratic faculty development sustains motivation and supports student achievement and satisfaction," and one might add, eventual career success (Bash 143).

Project Objectives: Flexible Programming and Prior Learning Assessment

The objectives of this proposal center around funding for two specific needs; the need for training and incentives for faculty to participate in an intensive workshop (or series of workshops) to increase their capacity to develop flexible programming and the need for training for faculty who will help develop and eventually oversee portfolio-based assessment for students in University College. Note that we anticipate that this initiative, already part of the institutional plan but in need of additional support, will eventually serve as a model for other colleges within WKU.

About 60% of the students seeking the Bachelor of Interdisciplinary Studies are non-traditional. Many come with significant work experience. Among these are soldiers who come through Ft. Knox and are granted an average of 27 credit hours toward graduation through ACE. This model provides an example of how prior learning assessment can speed up graduation for adult learners who have significant life experience.

Specific Objectives are:

- Ensure that WKU becomes an adult-focused institution by providing key programs in ways that enhance participation by non-traditional students.
- Train faculty in key programs ways to revise courses so that they are more accessible to adult learners.
- Offer a course-based learning portfolio assessment to augment current prior learning assessments such as ACE.
- Train faculty in best practices for portfolio assessment.

Description of Activities

Activity 1: Hold three Flexible Programming workshops during the year (or during the Winter Term in January)

Workshop Format: 9-3, lunch provided; guest consultant--Jim Berger; topics such as "what are adult learners' specific needs and challenges and how can faculty address those in their courses"; "what are the characteristics of an adult-focused syllabus"; hands-on work on selected syllabus; assignment for individual work, due Workshop #2. (See Appendix for Call and Rubric.)

Sessions will progress incrementally and would include such specific issues as:

Connecting with the Adult Learner
- Review characteristics of adult learners
- Identify learning styles of diverse adult learners
- Analyze characteristics of effective facilitators for diverse learners

Strategies for Effective Facilitation of Instruction for Diverse Adult Learners
- Examine how to establish a foundation for working with adult learners
- Explore effective learning environments for diverse learners
- Analyze differentiated instruction as an effective means of facilitating learning

Supportive Strategies for Diverse Adult Learners
- Examine strategies for engaging diverse adults in their learning
- Examine classroom communication strategies that support diverse adult learners
- Identify support services for diverse adult learners

Effective Diverse Curriculum
- Explore continuous improvement techniques to monitor and to adjust facilitation methods
- Examine best practices to monitor diverse adult learners' achievement of outcomes
- Demonstrate modification strategies for assignments, instruction, and assessments for diverse learners

Efforts will be made to ensure that the project is able to sustain itself (i.e. provide ongoing workshops) by applying for both internal and external grants.   Subsequent workshops would draw on faculty who participate in the 2009-2010 cohort to serve as facilitators.

University College, which is the home of *wkuREAL,* will pursue additional ways to ensure that this initiative sustains the momentum achieved in the initial year. For instance, to draw attention across the university to the importance of adult-focused instruction, UC will sponsor an "adult learner" faculty of the year award. Another effort—just underway—is the offering of "paired courses," whereby adult learners take two courses designed to be taken back-to-back. This summer we are experimenting with this format; the two instructors share texts and build assignments so that students develop them across the two courses, which are scheduled back-to-back, to accommodate the busy schedules of working adults and parents.

Activity 2: Develop faculty trained in Prior Learning Assessment

This effort will include sending at key faculty members to a national conference on PLA, inviting a CAEL representative to campus to host a workshop for interested faculty. Additional visits to universities with successful PLA programs will help ensure that the program is based on sound comparative research and that the approach we eventually adopt is best for WKU.

Evaluation Plan

We will measure success in the following ways:

1. Tracking Numbers: we will carefully monitor adult learners' participation in programs enhanced by flexible learning. Additionally, we will track number of flexible programming courses offered, number of credit hours earned by adult students in flexible courses, number of students enrolled in portfolio-based PLA course, number of credit hours given for PLA (over and above what we already do), number of faculty involved in flexible programming workshops, number of faculty involved in PLA workshops, etc.

2. Surveys: We will conduct surveys of participants in workshops to seek ways to improve them. We will also survey students periodically as they move through any of the programs revised according to the objectives herein.

3. Focus Groups/Exit Interviews: *wkuREAL* already has experience with holding focus groups with student groups to research the issues that adult learners face and creative solutions. Exit interviews are another good way to gain qualitative data about perceptions of learning, challenges, successes. At least one of these methods will be employed.

Financial Information

The bulk of this request is for stipends for faculty. As mentioned above, "cookie-cutter solutions" won't work. The demands on faculty increase constantly, especially during the current economic climate, and asking for change needs to be for sound reasons and with appropriate recompense. Additional funds are sought to support guest speakers, travel, and supplies.

$22,500   15 faculty stipends of $1,500 each, to attend workshops, revise a syllabus, and offer a newly conceived adult-focused course at least twice.
$840   Food for workshops—one lunch for each of three workshops; additional funding will be provided by University College.
$5,000   Travel for 3-4 faculty to national conference on adult learning (prior learning assessment, flexible programming).
$1660   3 consultants @ $500/day (travel, lodging, per diem covered by WKU).

Note: this is an approximate distribution; some funding may be shifted, either between categories or to WKU.

<u>Resources</u>

Adult Learning in Focus. Council for Adult and Experiential Learning, 2008.
Bash, Lee. Ed. *Best Practices of Adult Learning.* Bolton, MA: Anker Publ. Co., 2005.
Retooling Our Workforce to Meet the Nation's Economic Priorities. Council for Adult and
Experiential Learning, 2008.
Serving Adult Learners in Higher Education, Principles and Effectiveness, Council for Adult and
Experiential Learning, 2000.

Appendix: Adult-Focused Call and Rubric
wkuREAL

The Adult Learner Course Redesign Initiative seeks proposals for undergraduate courses redesigned specifically to meet the needs of adult learners.

This initiative encourages greater recognition of the needs of adult students, some of whom have college experience, while others may have never considered a college degree an option. Given the ways their job situations have changed, broad-based societal shifts in service and technology, and their own life-long learning desires, many adult learners need a 4-year degree (or more) in order to compete with younger graduates and to survive in the economic climate of the early 21st century.

"Adult-focused" Courses

An adult-focused course is one that's offered at times that fit adult schedules and in modalities that are sensitive to adults' learning needs. This might include but is not limited to distance learning, week-end or otherwise non-traditional schedules, new offerings at regional campuses, or some combination. Of special interest are modular courses that allow students to move at their own pace.

The Kentucky Adult Learner Initiative is developing a list of programs needed in the Commonwealth. Although we would like eventually to provide entire programs in an "adult focused" manner, we currently seek individual courses that would be of broad appeal.

Compensation

Every faculty member whose proposal is approved will receive $1500, to attend workshops, revise a syllabus, and offer a newly conceived adult-focused course at least once. In addition, the faculty member may receive either off-load pay or release time, subject to departmental approval.

Proposal Submission

Submit with your proposal by the dates indicated above to *wkuREAL*, University College, CH 301:

1. A one- or two-page proposal identifying the following, with particular emphasis on "c":
   a. the course number and title
   b. explanation of how this course would be of particular interest to adult learner
   c. explanation of changes you propose to make it adult-focused
   d. how often you propose offering it as an adult-focused course
2. A copy of this page with the section below filled out. Whether you propose to teach as an off-load or would like released time, along with signature of department head.
3. Sample syllabus (could be a detailed outline)

Name _____ Phone: _____ Department _____

Seek release time?   Y N Semester _____

OR Seek overload? Y N Semester _____

Signatures _____   _____
                            Yours   Department Head's

Adult-Focused Course Proposal Rubric

	Poor	Average	Excellent
Description of Course	Little to no description	Moderate description provided	Clear description of the course; includes information on how course was conducted prior to this proposal
Explanation of how course is responsive to adult learner needs	Low responsiveness; little connection to adult learners	Moderate description of how course will be sensitive to adult learners; Moderate change from existing course	Clear description of how the current course will be adapted to fit the needs of adult learners (e.g. time, place, mode of delivery; and how it will address their experiences/goals)
Instructional method	Relies mostly on lecture or other non-interactive methods	Course offers at most two methods to making the course flexible	Course proposal includes offering of a variety of flexible methods, for example: - Problem based learning - Active Learning - Collaborative learning
Resources	No inclusion of materials beyond textbooks	Brief discussion of materials and how they will be used to make the course more learner-focused	Clear and detailed description of materials to be incorporated in the proposed course and how they will enhance the techniques used to work with the adult learner. Examples may include, but not be limited to interactive tutorials, simulations, multimedia resources, etc.

Includes Term(s) of course?   Yes   No
Includes Course Title?   Yes   No
Includes how often course offered?   Yes   No